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EMBASSIES LONDON AND LISBON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: "FRANCAFRIQUE" -- MFA DISPUTES REPORTS ON A RETURN
TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

REF: A. 08 PARIS 1501
[1](#)B. 08 PARIS 1568
[1](#)C. 08 PARIS 1698

Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, reason 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: MFA's AF Assistant Secretary-equivalent Stephan Gompertz denied that France's approach to Africa is backsliding into the patterns of previous administrations' "francafrique." He insisted that France is not interfering in African countries' internal politics. He said that in the recent examples of Gabon, Niger, and Guinea, France has supported democratic change. Gompertz admits the "insider" influence of Robert Bourgi, and laments that France is still not focused on a more strategic approach to Africa. At the same time, he claims, (somewhat questionably), that it is the MFA's leadership that is driving the GOF's relations in Africa. In our view, France remains committed to its stated policy of developing transparent partnerships with Africans but, when pressed by circumstances, may resort to the more opaque ways associated with "francafrique" when doing so is in France's national interest. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) During a November 17 meeting with Pol Minister Counselor, the MFA's AF Assistant Secretary-equivalent Stephan Gompertz disputed the assertions made in a November 13 New York Times article that France "still pulls the strings" in Francophone Africa ("Ill Will Grows in a Former Colonial Regional as France Consorts With the Powerful," by Adam Nossiter), as well as similar commentary offered in recent weeks by the French media. Gompertz strongly denied that France interferes in a country's internal politics, and asserted that Sarkozy remains serious about moving away from the paternalistic and secret dealings of France's "francafrique" era. (Note: see Reftels for detailed analysis of "France's Changing Africa Policy." End note.)

RECENT CRITICISMS ARE "UNFAIR"

[1](#)3. (C) Responding to specific cases cited in the Nossiter article, Gompertz said the selective information presented was "unfair." He first seized on the example of Gabon's recent presidential elections, and insisted that France would have supported a different electoral outcome than Ali Bongo if the opposition had organized themselves to achieve victory. Having received almost 60 percent of the vote, it was the splintered and uncoordinated opposition that allowed Bongo to win, not France. Gompertz added that in his personal view Bongo was a more credible candidate than the two main opposition leaders, and asserted that Bongo has done "a pretty good job, so far," especially on addressing Gabon's endemic corruption.

[1](#)4. (C) For Niger, Gompertz said that "we are troubled." (The day before, with AF DAS Fitzgerald, Gompertz said that France

was "embarrassed" by the situation in Niger.) Gompertz claimed, however, that France led the international charge trying to stop President Tandja from changing the constitution and holding elections for a third term. He was bothered that the NY Times piece showed an old photo of Sarkozy and Tandja together, without explaining that Sarkozy later publicly advised Tandja to respect Niger's constitution and not stand for a third term. Gompertz added that after Tandja succeeded in his constitutional referendum, State Secretary Joyandet and later Foreign Minister Kouchner publicly and privately encouraged Tandja to postpone his election in order to work out a more democratic solution. Gompertz acknowledged that France had important interests in Niger, in particular its uranium concessions, and that France was very concerned about AQIM threats in the country. Still, it is unfair to describe France's efforts in Niger were not sincere, Gompertz said.

15. (C) The NY Times article also commented on the situation in Guinea, but Gompertz stressed that FM Kouchner was the most vocal and active critic of the regime after the September 28 violence. According to Gompertz, Kouchner pushed for the establishment of the International Contact Group, persuaded the EU to take a firm stand and pursue sanctions against Guinea's ruling junta, and it was Kouchner who convinced Senegalese President Wade to evacuate injured opposition leader Cellou Diallo to Dakar.

16. (C) Gompertz noted that Senior French officials, both at the MFA (and, in our experience, at the Elysee) routinely meet with African opposition leaders, both in Paris and overseas, adding that Joyandet was scheduled to meet with

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Cellou Diallo that afternoon.

FRANCE'S AFRICA POLICY DOES HAVE PROBLEMS

17. (C) Gompertz admitted that France's Africa policy does have problems, most notably, that France continues to focus most of its efforts on its former colonies, even though they are not necessarily the most strategically important. Gompertz hopes to push for a stronger engagement with Anglophone and Lusophone Africa. (Note: GOF officials frequently cite Nigeria, Angola, and South Africa as three of France's key emerging partners in Africa. Gompertz was departing the same afternoon for Morocco and South Africa. End note.) Similarly, too much of France's political and cooperation resources in Africa are designed to reinforce its partnerships within the international "Francophonie" organization. Gompertz cited the example of Burundi, where English is replacing French as the most popular foreign language, but he said this is understandable given Burundi's important trade links in the East African Community. At the same time, he related that while he was Ambassador to Ethiopia, there was a strong demand for French language teachers, but France was not responsive in helping meet this need.

18. (C) Targeting more closely the topic of "francafrique," Gompertz said he "regretted" that lawyer and presidential advisor Robert Bourgi (touted by the French press as the new standard bearer of the old "francafrique") was Sarkozy's friend, but "that's a fact of life." While admitting that Bourgi operates in the shadows and has influence on France's approach to Africa, Gompertz stated forcefully that policy for sub-Saharan Africa is led by "Kouchner, Joyandet, and me."

COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

19. (C) The sincere and mild-mannered Gompertz almost worked up a dander in defending France's approach to Africa as well as the importance of the MFA's leadership. However, though not entirely at odds with Gompertz's assertions, the GOF's Africa policy hands increasingly suggest France's need to

contrast the importance of stability in a volatile region with nobler democratic ideals, as has been shown in Niger, Mauritania, Madagascar, and, perhaps, now in Guinea. Unfortunately, there was not time during this meeting to ask about other notorious "francafrique" hotspots, such as the Republic of Congo, Togo, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. Also, by downplaying the role of Bourgi, and by not commenting on the important role of the Presidency's Secretary General Claude Gueant (also a friend of Bourgi) in shaping France's relations with African leaders, Gompertz, perhaps unwittingly, revealed his own concerns about a philosophical division between the Elysee and the MFA on Africa policy.

¶10. (C) Clearly, there is much jostling between the MFA and Presidency for Africa policy leadership. Remi Marechaux, one of the staff-level Africa advisors at the Elysee, scoffs whenever the issue of a resurgent "francafrique" is raised. He pointedly notes that during "francafrique's" heyday under the legendary Jacques Foccart, the Africa cell at the Presidency numbered about 80, including its own intelligence unit. Marechaux contrasts that with today's Africa cell at the Presidency, consisting of himself, Romain Serman (soon to be replaced by Clement Leclerc), and their recently-arrived boss (and Deputy Diplomatic Advisor) Andre Parant, who replaced Bruno Joubert. Marechaux bristles at the notion that the three of them are pulling strings the way their 80 predecessors did. Marechaux says that the role of the Elysee's Africa cell is to channel the policy ideas of President Sarkozy (admittedly influenced by Bourgi, Gueant, special advisor Henri Guaino, and Sarkozy's other close associates) and that the MFA's role is to do what bureaucracies traditionally do -- either implement those ideas or explain, with bureaucratic thoroughness, why those ideas are not feasible.

¶11. (C) Our own view is that there is a wide range of policy approaches available to the French, a spectrum running from the more ideal approaches Sarkozy expressed in his early days in office (reftels) to the more opaque but possibly more expedient approaches conforming to the old "francafrique" model. Circumstances and the unpredictable, sometimes violent nature of events in Africa may at times tempt or even force the French to act less ideally than they may want -- a form of behavior familiar to every other government in the

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world -- when decisions are based on a need to further the national interest in the most effective way possible, even when the most effective way may not be the prettiest way. We find the GOF's professional cadre of Africa hands accessible, open, and wanting to find common ground with the U.S. in many situations. Gompertz appeared as a man with a burden lifted when he was reminded of The New York Times' November 17 article asserting large-scale corruption by Equatorial Guinean Minister (and the President's son), Teodoro Nguema Obiang, reportedly a frequent visitor to and investor in the U.S.

¶12. (U) Conakry and Tripoli minimize considered.
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